

## NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

# CONQUER DIGITAL DISRUPTION BY CLOSING YOUR COMPANY'S TALENT GAP

**Nano Tools for Leaders®** are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

**Contributor:** Scott Snyder and Todd Hewlin, authors of *Goliath's Revenge: How Established Companies Turn the Tables on Digital Disruptors*

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### THE GOAL:

Thrive in the digital economy by getting the talent you need to make your new strategies happen through preemptive skill development.

### NANO TOOL:

Digital disruption is changing the ways that almost every company generates profits.<sup>1</sup> All companies realize that technology is important, but the ones that are thriving in this volatile environment are the ones that have made the switch to valuing talent over technology.

However, just looking outside your organization for talent with domain knowledge and experience plus deep technology know-how is, for most organizations, a losing proposition, because candidates with the required skills are in short supply. So how have the winning companies overcome these challenges? They've succeeded by using one or more of four parallel models for building a workforce with the skills needed not only today, but also far into the future.

### ACTION STEPS:

Consider a multi-pronged approach for getting the talent you need, combining two or more of these models. The more flexible you are in your talent-building approach, the more likely you will have the skills needed to address the changing needs of your business:

- 1. Internal development and mobility:** The millennial workforce isn't just interested in career development; they expect it, and about half will leave their jobs if they don't get it. In addition to numerous new learning opportunities, you need to provide career paths that allow talented young employees to experience a number of roles in a short time frame. This will lower attrition, accelerate learning, and get the right people to the right roles sooner. This approach requires a more flexible human capital model, aggressive mentoring, and just-in-time training to ensure productivity.
- 2. External recruiting:** While it can be expensive, this approach is the fastest way to close your company's gaps in hard-to-get skill areas like digital. If you have more money than time to deal with digital disruption, targeted external hires may be your path to accelerate your pace of innovation, provided there is a good fit with the company's purpose and objectives as well as support from key stakeholders in the business.



- 3. Partners and freelancers:** The imperative of time often makes partnering for some roles, such as emerging technology specialists, an attractive option. While contract talent will likely cost two to three times as much per person as an internal employee, you can put that talent to work immediately — and leverage it further by having partners mentor and develop your employees.
- 4. Skill grafting:** Rather than searching for individuals with the required breadth of experience, skill grafting creates teams with complementary skills to cover the necessary ground. Many digital organizations are experimenting with paired programming models that do this at scale. The end result is more employees with valuable hybrid skill sets across your business to support future opportunities. This approach has the added benefit of developing employees with a T-shaped skill set (individuals with broad knowledge in one area coupled with deep expertise in another) by exposing them to colleagues whose insights and experience can augment their existing skills.

## HOW ORGANIZATIONS USE IT:

Seattle Genetics, a biotechnology company focused on developing antibody-based therapies to treat cancer, prepares pharmacists for careers in biotech through its one-year Pharmacy Fellowship Program. The program offers leadership classes; hands-on experience in oncology marketing, medical affairs, and drug safety; one-on-one meetings with executives; and the opportunity to have their work published.

Tech start-up Bonjoro's global workforce is spread out across three continents (Europe, North America, and Australia). Growth manager Casey Hill says they hire freelancers because "we find that it gives us versatility and high-quality workforce at a good price point as a fast-growing startup. Often, with full-time employees, there is a longer learning curve and you are cultivating or developing them in your niche/industry over time. With freelancers, we feel that we are able to get high value quickly and can use them in a flexible capacity."

Roy Rosin, chief innovation officer at the University of Pennsylvania Health System, sensed that existing staff might react poorly to a large infusion of tech specialists. Instead, he created integrated teams composed of the top clinicians at Penn Medicine, technical specialists from Penn's own engineering program, and business minds from Wharton. These teams were then augmented sparingly with external hires and contractors.

Crafting a central staff primarily out of diversely skilled people with existing relationships to one another and to Penn proved easier and more efficient than chasing the few people with both health care domain knowledge and deep technical know-how. Further, Rosin's teams ended up being more unified and connected than a collection of outside hires would have been. The interdisciplinary teams have achieved impressive results in areas such as reducing readmissions due to pregnancy-related hypertension and freeing up time for maternity ward nurses. And they have been able to make decisions, conduct pilots, and innovate at an accelerated pace.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Goliath's Revenge: How Established Companies Turn the Tables on Digital Disruptors*, Todd Hewlin and Scott Snyder (Wiley, 2019). Offers six new rules of innovation for resetting your company's strategy — and your own career — to become a digital disruptor and carve out your future leadership position.
- Scott Snyder teaches in Wharton Executive Education's [Business Model Innovation in the Digital Age](#) program.

## REFERENCE:

1. See Forbes Insight report "[Data Versus Goliath: Customer Data Strategies to Disrupt the Disruptors](#)" and *Pivot to the Future*, by Omar Abbosh, Paul Nunes, and Larry Downes (PublicAffairs, 2019).

## ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

*Nano Tools for Leaders®* was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.